

Animals at Fairs and Festivals

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Summer is the time for fairs and festivals in Indiana. Almost every community or county in Indiana has a festival or a fair displaying agricultural products, 4-H Youth Programs, or other community industries or history with pride. Often these events include the exhibits of animals as part of the livestock show, petting zoos, or carnival games that sell or give animals as prizes.

The presence of animals at these public settings can be rewarding, from the pride of showing an award winning animal, handling or petting farm animals that have been seen only from a distance or in a picture, to becoming the owner of a new pet. There is also a potential downside to the inclusion of animals at our fairs and festivals. Lack of understanding the risks associated with animal exhibits and inadequate planning and preparation to reduce those risks can lead to illness and injury of those who handle animals in these settings. A number of disease outbreaks has been linked to fairs or festivals over the past several years where animals were present or in proximity to the event. In 1996, an Indiana infant died as the result of a *Salmonella* infection acquired from an iguana awarded as a prize at a county fair.

The greatest threat of handling animals in these settings is the transmission of enteric diseases from animals to people. The most common enteric diseases associated with animals are *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, and *Cryptosporidium parvum*. Disease transmission at exhibits is most often related to exposure to cattle, sheep, and goats, but other animals, including exotic pets (especially reptiles and amphibians), can also be sources of infections. The Indiana State Department of Health has received several reports of *Salmonella* infections originating from pet reptiles in the past several months, highlighting the risk these pets pose. Baby poultry have long been associated with transmission of *Salmonella* infections.

Animals may harbor these organisms in their intestinal tracts without evidence of disease and then shed them in their feces under the stressful conditions of the exhibit and handling by a large number of people. When an animal's hair, fur, or skin is contaminated with fecal matter containing these organisms, it is easy for human hands to become contaminated. Transmission can also occur from contamination of food such as raw milk or food served and/or consumed in a contaminated environment. Some of these organisms can survive for several months in facilities where animals have been housed.

Environmental factors that can contribute to transmission of enteric infections at fairs and festivals include inadequate hand-washing facilities, poor hand-washing techniques, temporary food facilities, contaminated or overtaxed drinking water systems, or inadequate waste disposal systems. Other factors that often lead to enteric disease outbreaks associated with these venues include the large number of children in attendance and hand-to-mouth activities that enhance the fecal-oral transmission of infections (thumb-sucking, eating, drinking, smoking) in the vicinity of animals or after handling animals without adequate hand washing. Several outbreaks in children have been linked to visits to farms, petting zoos, and reptile exhibits that lack proper hand-washing facilities, a lack of emphasis on the need for hand washing, and unsupervised hand washing.

To reduce the risk of an enteric disease outbreak among fair or festival attendees, the following steps should be taken:

1. Do not allow food or beverages to be prepared or consumed in animal areas. In addition, smoking and babies with bottles or pacifiers should not be permitted in animal areas.
2. Hand-washing stations should be placed at exits from animal areas. If stations with running water are not practical, hand-sanitizer stations can be substituted.
3. Areas where touching of animals or touching of surfaces where animals are contained should have manure removed promptly and any surfaces that people might touch should be cleaned and disinfected. All animal areas that will be used for non-animal activities should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after animals are removed and prior to other use.
4. Children under age five should be carefully supervised by adults when handling animals to ensure hand-to-mouth activities do not occur and that adequate hand washing follows the animal contact.

In addition to enteric disease, injuries are always possible when handling animals. Animal bites pose a special risk, due to the potential for transmission of rabies. No one has died from rabies as a result of an exposure at a fair or festival; however, there have been several incidents nationwide where hundreds of individuals received rabies post-exposure prophylaxis because of contact with an animal on display that was later diagnosed as rabid. Animals for which there is a licensed rabies vaccine available should be vaccinated sufficiently in advance of the event to ensure that they are not incubating rabies. Animals for which there is no licensed vaccine or that are not old enough to have received the vaccine should not be displayed in a manner that will allow direct contact with the public. This would apply in particular to wild animals (including dog/wolf or dog/coyote mixes) for which there is no licensed vaccine. Animals such as raccoons or descended skunks kept as pets are still considered wild animals. The DNR does not allow wild animals, even those allowed as pets, to be displayed in a manner that would allow contact with the public.

Animals are an important part of our daily lives and contribute greatly to the experience of a fair or a festival. The advice provided here will help ensure that the experience with animals is a safe and pleasant one.

Turtles and the Law

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The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has banned the sale of pet turtles, terrapins, and tortoises with a carapace (shell) less than four inches in length since the 1970s. This ban was instigated because these small turtles are known carriers of *Salmonella* and have been associated with outbreaks of *Salmonella* infections in people, especially children, over the years. The regulations governing the actions that the FDA may take can be reviewed at:

<http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfcfr/CFRSearch.cfm?FR=1240.62>.

In addition to the four-inch rule, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) also prohibits (with some exceptions) the sale or transport of several species of reptile and amphibians native to Indiana. Turtles and terrapins include:

- Common snapping turtle
- Smooth soft-shell turtle
- Spiny soft-shell turtle
- Alligator snapping turtle
- Eastern mud turtle
- Musk turtle
- Midland painted turtle
- Western painted turtle
- Spotted turtle
- Blanding's turtle
- Map turtle
- False map turtle
- Ouachita map turtle
- Ornate box turtle
- Red eared slider

For assistance in identifying individual turtle species, pictures are available at www.chicagoherp.org. The complete DNR rules on this subject can be viewed at <http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/endangered/turtles.htm>.